

REDESIGNED APPEALS DIVISION BEGINS WORK AT IRS

WASHINGTON -- As part of the Internal Revenue Service reorganization, the redesigned Appeals Division began work this week. The new Appeals will strive for enhanced customer service through faster case resolution and a variety of initiatives designed to accommodate taxpayer needs.

Appeals plays a vital role in the protection of taxpayer rights by having authority to settle disputes between taxpayers and operating divisions within the IRS. Appeals provides the final administrative opportunity to resolve the matter before going to court. Typically, Appeals reaches agreement with taxpayers on 90 percent of its cases. Last year, Appeals received over 58,000 new cases.

Appeals has reorganized its staffing into a headquarters and three operating units that align with the larger IRS operating divisions. Appeals Headquarters is responsible for addressing Appeals' strategic needs while the operating units will focus on providing service to different segments of taxpayers. "This will allow us to better focus our resources on providing top quality service to our customers," said Daniel L. Black, Jr., National Chief of Appeals.

Black reports directly to the IRS Commissioner and is responsible for planning, managing, directing and executing nationwide activities for Appeals. The office of the Deputy Chief Appeals, headed by Linda Garrard, has functional responsibility for all strategic planning in Appeals.

The Appeals operating divisions are:

- Appeals Large and Mid-Size Operating Unit, headed by Earl Blanche Jr.
- Appeals Small Business/Self-Employed - Tax Exempt and Government Entities Unit headed by John D. Piper with Christian G. Beck as Deputy.
- Appeals Wage and Investment Unit, which will not be operational until fiscal year 2002, will handle cases coming from IRS service centers.

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“Our vision for the new Appeals is to provide premier dispute resolution services that meet our customer needs through a highly skilled and satisfied workforce, innovative approaches, dynamic processes, and interpersonal skills that promote quality results,” Black said. “Major strategies for FY 2001-2002 are to reduce the length of time it takes for a case to go through Appeals and to improve taxpayer awareness of appeal rights and processes.”

Appeals has revamped its processes and is creating new services for our customers. These include:

- The Mutually Accelerated Appeals Process (MAAP) initiative is designed to reduce the time it takes to resolve Coordinated Examination Program (CEP) cases in Appeals. This initiative will improve the efficiency of the Appeals large case program and result in increased customer satisfaction for the large case population that Appeals serves.

- Fast Track Mediation (FTM): This is a streamlined process designed to expedite disputes involving audits, offers in compromise and trust fund recovery penalties. In this process, appeals officers will serve as mediators to resolve disputes while cases are still in Compliance. The FTM pilot began on July 1, 2000 in four sites: Denver, Hartford, Houston and Jacksonville.

- Arbitration: This program is a new alternative dispute resolution initiative designed to assist taxpayers and Appeals in reaching a settlement when they were unable to in the normal course of the Appeals process. This program uses a neutral decision-maker that will reach a binding decision on issues that prevented the taxpayer and Appeals from reaching a settlement.

- Mediation: This program is an alternative dispute resolution initiative designed to assist taxpayers and Appeals in reaching a settlement. A non-IRS or Appeals mediator is used to facilitate negotiations between Appeals and taxpayers when they were unable to reach a settlement in the normal course of the Appeals process.

- Early Referral: Early referral procedures allow all taxpayers, whose returns are being examined, to request the transfer of a developed but unagreed issue to Appeals, while Examination continues to develop other issues in the case. The purpose is to resolve cases more expeditiously.

For additional information, visit the Appeals Internet Web site at:
http://www.irs.gov/prod/ind_info/appeals

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At this site there is a section on "Appeals Expectations - Yours and Ours," which provides mutual commitments for the Appeals process. Taxpayers can also contact an Appeals Customer Service representative at 1-877-457-5055 for a wide range of assistance relating to Appeals.

"My staff and I are committed to providing our customers top rate dispute resolution service," Black said.

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